On religion

Chapter Ten: On Religion

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Henri de Lubac was both a theological writer and a theological teacher. As a writer, he is best known for the topics covered elsewhere in this volume, such as grace, ecclesiology and scriptural exegesis. However, from September 1929 he was also a teacher, occupying the chair of fundamental theology at the Catholic Theological Faculty in Lyons. Within the Faculty there was no position in the history of religions, so de Lubac was asked to develop and teach a supplementary course on this topic.[1] Although a Faculty member, de Lubac, being a Jesuit, lived in the Jesuit scholasticate on Fourvière, the hill facing the city centre across the River Saône that is dominated by its nineteenth century basilica. Because he resided at the scholasticate he was also expected, from 1935, to offer a course there, which was also on the history of religions.[2] These duties continued until 1940, when the Vichy government of Marshal Pétain, which had been established with Nazi agreement, assumed control of the southern half of France. As a result of these teaching assignments, de Lubac spent considerable time in the 1930s reflecting on religious origins and the relation of Christianity to other religions. Some of the material amassed through this decade was published at the time, but it also provided the basis for his later writing on religion published during the 1950s and 1960s.

This material has been little read or understood, to the extent that Hans Urs von Balthasar portrayed de Lubac's view of Buddhism as 'Eastern atheism'.[3] This is a significant misinterpretation of the latter's actual assessment of Buddhism, which is all the more striking because it ignores the wider context given by the significant writings on religion that de Lubac

[1] ASC, pp. 31–2.

[2] ASC, pp. 67–8.

[3] Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Theology of Henri de Lubac* (trans. Joseph Fessio and Michael M. Waldstein; San Francisco: Ignatius, 1991), pp. 54–9.

published from 1933.[4] I have corrected Balthasar's misreading in an earlier article,[5] so I will not repeat this important discussion here. Rather, in this chapter I shall address de Lubac's understanding of the category of 'religion' in general and his view of the relation of the Christian faith to other religions.

It might be supposed that de Lubac's conception of grace as suffusing the whole of nature—his *surnaturel* thesis—leads him to the view that all religions provide equivalent revelations of divine truth. In fact he opposes such a view, denying that every spiritual or religious manifestation is equally graced. Nevertheless, he is far more accepting of religion as a category, and of specific non-Christian religions, than might be supposed. I shall begin by surveying de Lubac's evaluation of theories about the origin of religion and their archaeological and ethnographic bases. His discussions of monotheism will then be considered, before an exposition of the relation he sees between Christ and Israel. The next topic will be the theology of Christian mission, in both ancient syncretistic and modern global contexts. I shall then show how de Lubac's understanding of Judaism was forged in the crucible of the Nazi persecution of the Jews, and finally consider what de Lubac might offer to Christian–Muslim relations in the present day. In the course of the chapter it will become clear that de Lubac articulates a nuanced theology of religion that is well-integrated into elements of his thought that are examined in other chapters.

[A] Religious origins

Where does the idea of 'religion' come from? In his summary of a course given in 1935, de Lubac begins by excluding four possible illusory origins:

[4] TF, pp. 289–307.

[5] David Grumett and Thomas Plant, 'De Lubac, Pure Land Buddhism, and Roman Catholicism', *The Journal of Religion* 92 (2012), pp. 58–83.

i) Religion cannot be identified with the psychic religious disposition of early humans, because we have scant reliable knowledge of any such disposition.[6] Moreover, although ethnologists might try to understand the past via the present indigenous cultures of Africa and Australia, these do not provide reliable windows onto the past. Prehistorians might draw inferences from ancient artefacts and documents, but even the earliest examples of these, de Lubac reminds his readers, far postdate the dawn of human life.

ii) A picture of religious origins cannot be formed from a synthesis of the religious understandings of diverse indigenous groups into an idea of the 'primitive'.[7] Such syntheses were developed by figures like Auguste Comte, Sir James Frazer and their successors, who sought to situate distinct cultures within a single developmental trajectory. They were founded on a positivist reduction of religion that was based on speculation and ideology. Their pretext has usually been the notion that true spiritual maturity consists not in religion but in its elimination, which on this view is produced by an original error or an irrational initial principle.

iii) Neither may religion be understood using a methodology that seeks to isolate the purportedly purely religious dimension of every individual manifestation and then to connect these into a developmental trajectory.[8] This, de Lubac asserts, is because religion is always situated within a social and cultural network that changes and evolves as a result of factors that are not themselves purely religious. The notion of 'pure' religion is, paradoxically, a construct of the merely phenomenological terms of scientific determinism.

[6] TF, pp. 309–11.

[7] TF, pp. 311–14.

[8] TF, pp. 314–15.

iv) Religious origins cannot be accounted for by objective facts and method, because these in reality depend on a constructed system that is far from objective.[9] They conflate historical and psychological explanations, ultimately constructing each as a function of philosophy. Moreover, de Lubac avers that purported objectivism treats scientific findings as if they were raw facts, leaving unrecognized the grounding of scientific theory in subjective experience and the need for it always to be interrogated by that experience.

In what amounts to a ground-clearing exercise, de Lubac thereby rejects a series of scientific conceptions of religion, regarding these as outmoded and based on unsupportable assumptions. He then proceeds to a more favourable, and indeed fascinating, discussion of historical conceptions of religious origins. This he opens by refuting the thesis, which was a cornerstone of Leninism, that the earliest phase of human history was irreligious. De Lubac critically discusses how this Leninist view of historical development, which was grounded in ideology rather than research, was nevertheless lent credence by unreliable ethnographic findings.[10] A range of indigenous peoples have often been claimed as atheists, including the Arunta of Central Australia and the Yahgan of Tierra del Fuego, the archipelago at the southern tip of South America. However, following more extensive observation, many such claims have been shown to be ill-founded, with rites and beliefs identified that, although crude, are highly complex. Moreover, de Lubac reports research findings that the earliest significant human remains (dating from the end of the Mousterian period, around 40,000 BCE) evidence a 'care given to burial [that] attests to an order of concerns that is difficult to clarify but that can be called religious, at least in the broad sense'.[11] He also discusses Pygmy

[9] TF, pp. 315–16.

[10] TF, pp. 318–19.

[11] TF, p. 319.

culture, to be found in the Congo as well as on islands and in mountain regions from the West African coast to Oceania. This is characterized by the use of wood and bone for tools, the absence of figurative art, dwellings constructed out of tree branches, hunting and gathering, and consequent dependence for food on more agriculturally developed neighbours.[12] It might be inferred from features such as these that pygmies lack religious belief. For example, figurative art enables religious representation while settled agriculture is linked with systems of offering and sacrifice. Nevertheless, observers of pygmy groups have frequently detected elements of animism, magic, mythology and totemism. These could have spread from neighbours, but the point remains that, contra Marx and Lenin, even basic technological and cultural developments such as the use of stone tools and agriculture, and in some cases fire, are not preconditions for religion. Belief is more deeply rooted in human culture than this and no mere function of material conditions.

De Lubac ends this section with an examination of the less personified *mana* acknowledged by Melanesians and its correlates in other indigenous religions. This may be described as an infinite, impersonal supernatural power 'spread through many diverse objects and absolutely distinct from all material power'.[13] Such a conception, de Lubac suggests, leads the seeker for religious roots into a 'pre-animism' akin to Rudolph Otto's idea of the numinous. It thereby suggestively combines the belief in a unified sacred power immanent in the created order with the sense that this power is supernatural and therefore differentiated from material reality. In Christian context, the notion of a supernatural power diffused through the created order may be combined with a monotheistic concept of God if this power is viewed as the activity, effects or energy of a single Godhead. De Lubac's exposition of religious origins, while drawing strongly on historical and empirical material, thus includes a clearly theological dimension. Like his better-known theology of the supernatural, it is also grounded in detailed historical research and penetrating theological perception.

[12] TF, p. 321.

[13] TF, p. 325.

[B] The idea of monotheism

What more can be said about the form that religious belief might take in less technologically advanced human cultures? It might be assumed that such belief is animist and polytheist, progressing only later to conceptions of the Godhead as simple and transcendent. However, de Lubac positively endorses evidence that monotheism was, in fact, not a late development in human religiosity, embracing the 'primitive monotheism' thesis associated with the Catholic priest and ethnographer Wilhelm Schmidt.[14] De Lubac contends that many indigenous groups with little technological development possess a 'few flashes of the belief in a clearly superior being'.[15] Such a being is named and clearly differentiated from the natural spirits or souls of the dead. This being is the powerful creator of the world, and ruler of life and death. Sometimes the being is good, rendering judgement and watching over the world. Examples of indigenous peoples among whom belief in a single superior being is identifiable include the Pygmies, Arunta and Yahgan, the native American Pawnee, the West African Bantu and the Jola of Senegal. Confusion has often resulted from the relative invisibility of these 'high gods' in public worship and culture. Nevertheless, in forms such as the Aboriginal 'first Ancestor' and the Native American 'Old Man who never dies', the existence of primitive monotheism brings de Lubac to argue that belief in a single God is not parasitic on religious forms that might be regarded as the product of superstition. This is an important point of defence against critics of modern religion who seek to denigrate it by its association with other religious forms. Monotheism is self-grounding and a perennial feature of the landscape of human belief.

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[14] For which, see Henryk Zimoń, 'Wilhelm Schmidt's Theory of Primitive Monotheism and its Critique within the Vienna School of Ethnology', *Anthropos* 81 (1986), pp. 243–60 (246–8); Ernest Brandewie, *Wilhelm Schmidt and the Origin of the Idea of God* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1983), pp. 41–6.

[15] TF, p. 322.

De Lubac is not content to employ 'monotheism' as a univocal category, sharply distinguishing two different types.[16] The first type is a *monotheism of accommodation*. A product of social, political and intellectual developments, this forms gods in the image of earthly realities. These gods are gradually ordered into a unified hierarchy out of which emerges a God who is supreme. De Lubac identifies this type of monotheism with the privileged imperial religions of Babylon, Persia, Greece and Rome. However, he contends that the result was either a merely abstract deity or a divinized nature. Monotheisms of accommodation failed to establish a God who truly both transcended the world and was active on and within the world. This is belied by their toleration of polytheistic practices, which were predicated on a tacit acceptance of the limitation of the power of the supreme God.

The second variety of monotheism that de Lubac identifies is an *exclusivist monotheism*. This is grounded in the uncompromising affirmation of divine uniqueness, of a 'Being who is not at all abstract although completely spiritual; an intransigent Being who claims all worship for himself and wishes to be recognized by all; a transcendent Being who extends beyond earthly cities, even the city of the world'.[17] This type of monotheism triumphs over the first, because it succeeds in founding a concept of God as both transcendent *and* all-powerful in the world. In so doing, exclusivist monotheism appropriates to itself the categories and language developed by monotheisms of accommodation for the purposes of expression, conceptualization and mission. Its pre-Christian roots have been evident in Zoroastrianism (Mazdaism) and in the small and persecuted religion of Israel.

The Gâthâs, which are the sacred poems of the teacher Zoroaster (Zarathustra) that comprise the most sacred texts of the religion named after him, describe a future divine judgement of the world by conflagration. This great event is longed for by the righteous, who receive the title of *saošyant* (benefactor or saviour) and will inaugurate priestly rule on earth. In other Zoroastrian

[16] TF, pp. 328–9/DG, pp. 26–9.

[17] TF, p. 329.

scriptures the role of the supreme Saošyant is emphasised, and world history is divided into four periods each lasting three millennia. The first period is a purely spiritual creation. The second is the formation of the material world, including the primordial man and the primordial bull. The third period opens with the start of the human race and the conflict between Ahura Mazda, the wise Lord, and Aura Mainyu his adversary. The appearance of Zoroaster himself precipitates the fourth and final period, which is composed of three millennial divisions each commencing with the rule of one of his sons. At the end of time the supreme Saošyant arrives on earth flanked by his six assistants in order to destroy evil, complete the world and resurrect the dead.[18]

Key themes that would become core in Christian theology are here identifiable. These include: a theology of history, with successive epochs of preparation for Christ's coming; Christ's life, ministry, death and resurrection on earth; and the post-Ascension mission and preaching of the Church. Also present is a theology of spiritual and material creation, and a final judgment that deploys imagery strikingly similar to that of Revelation.[19] De Lubac appraises Zoroastrianism as offering a broadly optimistic view of history with a positive view of the role of individual agency in bringing the world to its maturity. Nevertheless, he contends that its view of nature was founded on a cosmic eschatology that was at root scientific rather than theological, being an uncritical appropriation of Indo-European conflagration nature-mythology.[20] Religious belief ultimately accommodated itself to existing cosmological boundaries rather than breaking open those boundaries and effecting a radical reorientation of thought and life.

The view of history set forth in the Old Testament and embraced by Israel could not, de Lubac suggests, have been more different. Although cosmological disturbances also occur in the

[18] C, pp. 158–9.

[19] See Anders Hultgård, 'Zoroastrian influences on Judaism, Christianity and Islam', in Michael Stausberg, *Zarathustra and Zoroastrianism: A Short Introduction* (London: Equinox, 2008), pp. 101–12.

[20] C, pp. 160–3.

Israelite religious narrative, they are contingent upon human events rather than driving those events, being functions of the drama of the relationship between Israel and Yahweh as history progresses towards its end. For instance, hailstorms or plagues are means of moral and spiritual chastisement. Moreover, although Yahweh is the God of history He speaks to believers personally.[21] Furthermore, Yahweh's relation with Israel is grounded in covenant. Israel may infringe the terms of this covenant, provoking divine disfavour and judgement, and does not merely perform its role within a narrative of inevitable progress. In general, God acts primarily not in nature but in history, with the principal form of divine judgement being the destruction of empires rather than natural cataclysm.[22] The corollary of this divine judgement is Israel's comprehensive and stubborn Messianic hope. Although they are judged, sometimes with severity, other peoples also experience divine wrath and Yahweh acts in the world with purpose. Despite being a small and marginal group of tribes, Israel exegetes the whole of history, including the catastrophes that bring it to the brink of annihilation, as part of God's plan for his chosen people.

[C] Religions, Christ and Israel

At the beginning of this chapter it was explained that de Lubac delivered courses in the 'history of religions' (*l'histoire des religions*) at both the Catholic Theological Faculty in Lyons and the Jesuit scholasticate. The comparative approach to religion, based on the supposition that different 'religions' could be neutrally set alongside each other, had been in vogue since the nineteenth century.[23] However, de Lubac had never been satisfied with this methodology, and—notwithstanding his course titles—contested common understandings of the topic by refuting, as was shown, several varieties of psychological, historical and philosophical reductionism. By the 1960s he questioned the idea of religious pluralism directly. The issue was partly one of language,

[21] C, pp. 156–7.

[22] C, pp. 160–1.

[23] TF, p. 35.

although not for this reason any less significant. De Lubac asks: 'Does not one speak today, in an empirical sense, of diverse religions, among which there are no scruples about including Christianity—in the class of "universal religions"—all the while affirming that Christianity is the only "true religion"?'[24] Indeed, he observes in a footnote that the standard designation of the subject in Catholic theological faculties has always been *historia religionis*, or 'history of religion', which is singular.

Examples may inevitably be cited from both past history and the present day of spiritual affinity across religious boundaries, especially between mystics. For example, the Sufi may well feel greater commonality with Saint Teresa of Avila, a Zen Buddhist or the Upanishads than with a Shi'ite jurist. Indeed, the mystical inclination is to 'seek a spiritual union of men transcending the walls of specific religious beliefs'.[25] Nevertheless, de Lubac insists that to take the further step of positing a transcendent unity of religions is misguided, giving 'insufficient attention to the qualitative differences' between religions.[26] The nub of the problem is the tendency to view mysticism as the experiential and even epistemological ground of all religions instead of a collection of similar practices identifiable across different religions. Mysticism is not an alternative path to faith that renders the content of belief superfluous. Neither does it provide an entry into a heightened but generic variety of spiritual experience. Rather, mysticism is subsequent to prior concrete faith and dependent upon the content of belief.

So far as the Christian faith is concerned, specifically christological mysticism is prominent in the New Testament writings of both Paul and John and is taken up by early writers including Ignatius of Antioch, Evagrius and Pseudo-Dionysius.[27] Over time this mysticism has acquired unique characteristics that are not shared with the mysticisms of other religions. It is grounded in a

[24] TF, p. 40.

[25] TF, p. 45.

[26] TF, p. 46.

[27] TF, pp. 49–51.

doctrine of likeness, with the divine image present in every person. This does not mean that humans are godlike; indeed, in a religion context it suggests the opposite. Referring to John of the Cross, de Lubac indicates that likeness entails not identity with God but difference from God.[28] For John, this is because creatures are attached to darkness, whereas God is light, and darkness and light are contraries. Quoting Augustine's statement that 'God is whole everywhere, yet he does not dwell in all persons',[29] de Lubac excludes the possibility allowed by some animistic religions that God is fully present within the created order. For Augustine, God is everywhere by his divine presence although not through the indwelling of his grace, and even his people, who dwell in that grace, remain on an earthly pilgrimage of partial estrangement from him. De Lubac expounds four other distinctive marks of Christian mysticism. It is goal-directed, resisting closure in favour of a hope that will be fulfilled only in God's future time. It is essentially an understanding of Scripture, through the dimensions of allegory (doctrine), tropology (ethics) and anagogy (eschatology). It is established in the loving union of God and the believer, which can be presented as spiritual marriage. It is Trinitarian, and thereby fulfilled in personal Being.[30]

De Lubac judged religion (in the singular) to be a useful constructive category in so far as it aided an understanding of the genesis of Christianity. He unfolds his own understanding of this genesis with breadth and ambition in *Catholicism*, first published in 1938, at the end of a decade during which he had been working extensively on religion. He discusses how Christianity adopts the Jewish historical tropes of sin, captivity, release and redemption.[31] Just as unfaithful Israel was

[28] John of the Cross, *The Ascent of Mount Carmel* 1.4, in *Selected Writings*, ed. Kieran Kavanaugh (New York: Paulist, 1987), p. 65–9.

[29] Augustine, *Letters* 187.5.16, trans. Roland Teske (4 vols.; New York: New City, 2001–5), vol. 3, p. 237. Unusually for de Lubac, the references to Augustine and John are reversed by mistake, and the exposition could be clearer.

[30] TF, pp. 57–63.

[31] C, pp. 154–6.

captive in Egypt until being led out to freedom by Moses, so the sinners chosen by Christ, who awaited his coming, were also set free by him. However, for de Lubac the Old Testament is far more than a source of images to be mined by Christians: the actual history of this Testament is part of Christian history, which embraces and intensifies the historical and social dimensions of the religion of Israel. The reality typified in the Old Testament is 'not merely spiritual, it is incarnate; it is not merely spiritual but historical as well'.[32] De Lubac continues:

> What we call nowadays the Old and New Testaments is not primarily a book. It is a twofold event, a twofold 'covenant', a twofold dispensation which unfolds its development through the ages, and which is fixed, one might suppose, by no written account. When the Fathers said that God was its author—the one and only author of the Old and New Testaments—they … saw in him the founder, the lawgiver, the institutor of these two 'instruments' of salvation, these two economies, two dispensations which are described in the Scriptures and which divide between them the history of the world.[33]

This dual covenant, de Lubac continues, is at present incomplete. Many Christian theologians would accept that the Old Testament does not contain a complete literal Christian meaning; however, de Lubac insists that this applies just as much to the New Testament. Each Testament contains a spiritual meaning, which is prophetic. Although truth itself is contained in the New Testament, this is therefore reflected rather than direct. Truth will be fully comprehensible only in an eschatological future, and cannot be accessed in its totality in the present day.

Nevertheless, de Lubac views the New Testament as completing the expository process begun in the Old on the grounds that it contains within itself the principle of its own interpretation. The Old Testament describes a redemption that is still to come, comprising in its later parts a series of prophecies about future events. In contrast, Christ, being himself the truth of whom the New

[32] C, p. 169.

[33] C, pp. 169–70.

Testament speaks, is equally its interpreter. This Testament is therefore not only chronologically 'newer' in the obvious sense of succeeding the Old but eternally new by unlocking the key of its own interpretation.[34] For the same reason the New Testament is also the final Testament, lacking nothing necessary for its completion. However, the hermeneutical key that it provides also unlocks the Old Testament, causing Christ to appear 'preceded by the shadows and the figures which he himself had cast on Jewish history'.[35] In Patristic exegesis this idea is expounded in the imagery of the six ages of the world drawn from a reading of the Old Testament through the lens of the parables of Matthew 13, which together 'fashion a sacred history'.[36] The enemy who comes by night to sow weeds among the wheat is allied with Adam and Cain. The mustard seed sown after the Flood grows into the great tree of all peoples. The yeast is the faith of Abraham, which was accepted first in the synagogue but would later spread throughout the world. The buried treasure is the message of the prophets hidden in the field of prophecy. The pearl of great price, which the merchant sells everything in order to purchase, is Christ, who had come to be desired by the Jews in exile. The net thrown into the sea, in which fish of every kind are caught, is the kingdom of heaven.

Thus is presented the harmonious agreement of the Testaments, which together compose a single garment and a single body for the Word. Nonetheless, de Lubac is unafraid to identify a corollary of the New Testament's newness as being the ending of the Old Testament. Christ as the end (*telos*) of the Law opens a new scriptural hermeneutic, with an 'outworn literalism … made new in the everlasting newness of the Spirit'.[37] Only Christ can unlock the riddles of the prophets, open the book that has been closed with seven seals and bring together Jew and Gentile. Only he can provide the body of the Old Testament with its soul. At the moment when Christ died on the Cross the Temple veil was rent, signifying the 'downfall of the letter of Jewish worship and the

[34] C, pp. 171–2.

[35] C, p. 174.

[36] C, p. 204.

[37] C, p. 177.

manifestation of the mystery foretold in figure by this worship'.[38] Notably, it is through the liturgical texts of the Psalms that Christ continually speaks, whether as saviour, suffering servant or the community whose body he is.[39]

De Lubac's understanding of the relation of Christian religion and scripture to those of Israel emerges from his immersion in Patristic texts. For instance, within the long appendix of such texts at the end of *Catholicism* he quotes a passage from William of Auvergne's tract *On the Sacrament of the Eucharist*: 'When God's cult, the true religion, was first established in the world, it existed rather in the manner of a seed or an infant, because the community of mankind itself was immature and unfitted for anything more advanced.'[40] This excerpt effectively illustrates the contradictions and potential ambiguities of the path that de Lubac wished to tread. To designate the faith of Israel as 'true religion' was to afford it a far greater degree of respect than would most contemporary and many present-day theologians. Moreover, in the excerpt humanity is treated collectively across time and space, rather than as successive groupings each possessing progressively superior forms of religion. Nevertheless, simply by employing an allegorical reading of Scripture based on the revelation of Christ, de Lubac is unable to avoid a supersessionist reading of how the Christian religion relates to prior religions, despite the inconsistencies that sometimes seem to be generated by his conflated interpretations of many different Patristic texts in succession. However, it should be made clear that, in de Lubac's exposition, Israel does not serve as a proxy for modern Judaism. The latter became a central concern of his as the Nazi persecution of Jews living in France and elsewhere increased, and will be considered in greater detail later in this chapter.

[D] Religion, mission and salvation

[38] C, pp. 179–80.

[39] C, pp. 193–5.

[40] C, p. 422.

The category of mission can sit uneasily alongside that of religion. For some critics, to accept the validity of the concept of 'religion' is to view differing faith commitments as providing equivalent sets of content that each perform the same function of providing meaning within structurally identical social and cognitive spaces. These different content sets, being dependent on a prior shared structure, offer narratives that are chosen or refused according to personal preference.[41] Elements of de Lubac's work on the history of religions might seem to lend support to this view of different religions as equivalent. In an essay first published in 1933 he evokes the syncretic religious history of the Gobi Desert, which extends across large swathes of northern China and southern Mongolia.[42] Traversed by the Silk Road caravan route and later within the Mongol Empire, the desert was a melting pot of interreligious encounter, assimilation and division. Excited by the discoveries of recent decades in Chinese Turkestan, de Lubac describes how, from around the time of Christ's birth and continuing for almost a millennium, Buddhist missionaries traversed the desert eastward from Turkestan into China while Chinese pilgrims passed westward into India, communicating using the now forgotten common language of Sogdian.[43] The Gobi Desert was home to Mahāyāna (Great Vehicle) and Hīnayāna (Smaller Vehicle) Buddhists, Daoists, Zoroastrians, Jews, Manicheans and Nestorian Christians.[44] De Lubac describes ancient Jewish trading colonies and Syriac Christian monasteries located in what is now modern China, the latter being the product of the Christian mission that began around the time of the Council of Nicaea.[45]

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[41] E.g., *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness* (eds John Hick and Paul Knitter; London: SCM, 1987).

[42] For the geography, see Ian Gillman and Hans-Joachim Klimkeit, *Christians in Asia Before 1500* (Richmond: Curzon, 1999), pp. 205–34, and for a beautifully illustrated wider overview, Valerie Hansen, *The Silk Road: A New History* (Oxford University Press, 2012).

[43] TF, pp. 296–8, 291.

[44] TF, p. 300.

[45] For the first millennium, including the eighth-century high point, Jean-Pierre Charbonnier, *Christians in China, A.D. 600 to 2000* (trans. M.N.L. Couve de Murville; San Francisco: Ignatius,

Having in mind the empires of Greece and Rome, de Lubac depicts the Gobi Desert as an interior Asiatic Sea that, similarly to the Mediterranean Sea, sustained communication between the cultures on its shores and enabled their cross-fertilisation.[46]

This spread and transmutation of religions across geographical space did not, however, continue. As Islam in the West and state-sponsored Tang dynasty Buddhism in the East each secured their respective territory, the 'two halves of the world were cut off from each other, and the Gobi fell asleep under its sands'.[47] Christian missions made little further progress, notwithstanding the continuing presence of small syncretistic communities. Not until Matthew Ricci and the seventeenth century missionaries who followed him to China by sea would a new missionary wave break, rekindling memories of a past Christian culture. But this was a very different variety of mission from that which had preceded it. As de Lubac observes, the Christian faith would 'no longer spread from neighbour to neighbour, quite naturally assimilating new human elements at each stage'.[48] Rather, the modern missionary paradigm was established, with mission now understood as a journey from a Christian centre into alien and often hostile territory for the express purpose of making converts.

This concept of mission supposes that belief is grounded in an act of faith by which a person makes a conscious decision to assent to the truth of a specified religion, in this case the religion of Christ. This decision is often termed conversion, especially if the person has previously adhered to a different religion. But may a person who has not converted be saved? Two different possibilities

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2007), pp. 19–67; Gillman and Klimkeit, *Christians*, pp. 267–85; Samuel H. Moffett, *A History of Christianity in Asia* (2 vols; Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2nd edn, 1998), vol. 1, pp. 287–323. For the Mongol period of the thirteenth and earlier fourteenth centuries, Charbonnier, *Christians*, pp. 69–90; Gillman and Klimkeit, *Christians*, pp. 234–51, 285–98; Moffett, *History*, pp. 442–56.

[46] TF, p. 305.

[47] TF, p. 307.

[48] TF, p. 307.

need to be examined: the salvation of the person who has not heard the Gospel message, and the salvation of the person who has heard this message but has not converted.

When considering the salvation of the person to whom the Gospel has not been preached, de Lubac is inspired by Patristic reflection on the salvation of non-Christians. He resists the Jansenist presumption that divine grace is restricted to a small, clearly defined group of faithful Christians. Grace cannot be diluted, and is no less powerful the more lavishly or widely it is bestowed.[49] De Lubac cites the opinion of Irenaeus that, from the beginning of the world, Christ has given some kind of revelation of the Father—even if obscure—to 'all men together, whom from the beginning, according to their capacity, in their generation have both feared and loved God, and practised justice and piety towards their neighbours'.[50] This comprehensive bestowal of revelation results from the universality of Christ's action. Quoting Irenaeus, de Lubac depicts Christ 'universally extended in all the world', encompassing its 'length and breadth and height and depth' and ordering and disposing the whole universe 'in which is crucified the Son of God, inscribed crosswise upon it all'.[51] He cites John Chrysostom's description of grace exerting an attraction upon every soul, 'shed forth upon all, turning itself back neither from Jew, nor Greek, nor Barbarian, nor Scythian … but admitting all alike, and inviting all with an equal regard'.[52]

De Lubac cites passages suggesting that divine mercy has, through the course of history, been at work among the whole human race and that even non-Christian cultures have hidden saints and prophets.[53] Moreover, in these texts it is made particularly clear that the universality of salvation is the result not of human effort but of God's sovereign action. Neither is the idea of

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[49] C, pp. 217–18.

[50] Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 4.22.2, in *ANF* 1, p. 494.

[51] *Irenaeus's Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching* 34 (trans. J. Armitage Robinson, ed. Iain M. MacKenzie; Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002), p. 11.

[52] John Chrysostom, Homily on John 1.9, in *NPNF* 1.14, p. 29.

[53] C, pp. 218–20.

universal salvation a concession to liberal theology. Rather, salvation is universal as a result of the divine will that the 'whole race of humankind in all its diversity' will be saved.[54] In his letter to the priest Deogratias, advising him on how to respond to the pagan question about the status of people who lived before the coming of Christ, Augustine writes that pagans should acknowledge that it 'makes no difference that people worship with different ceremonies in accord with the different requirements of times and places, if what is worshipped is holy…. And the divinity was certainly never lacking to the righteousness and piety of human beings for their salvation'.[55] This suggests that the power of grace works across religious boundaries. Later in the same letter, Augustine writes of Christ that 'from the beginning of the human race … he did not cease to speak in prophecies, and there were not lacking those who believed in him, both from Adam up to Moses and in the people of Israel … as well as in other peoples before Christ came in the flesh'.[56] The place of non-Jews in God's plan appears again in *The City of God*, in which Augustine avers that 'it is not unacceptable for us to believe that, in other peoples as well as the Jews, there were men to whom this mystery was revealed'. Citing Job, who was not a Jew but an Edomite, he affirms that 'in other nations also there have been some men who belonged, not by earthly but by heavenly fellowship, to the true Israelites, the citizens of the supernal fatherland'.[57] Similar Old Testament figures include the Moabite widow Ruth, who married Boaz and became the great-grandmother of King David; the

[54] Augustine, *Enchiridion* 27, 103, in *On Christian Belief* (trans. Matthew O'Connell; New York: New City, 2005), p. 333.

[55] Augustine, *Letters* 102.10 (trans. Roland Teske; 4 vols.; New York: New City, 2001–5), vol. 2, pp. 25–6.

[56] Augustine, *Letters* 102.15, vol. 2, p. 28.

[57] Augustine, *The City of God against the Pagans* 18.47 (trans. R.W. Dyson; Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 893.

Aramean army commander Naaman, whose leprosy Elisha healed; and the Mesopotamian diviner Balaam, who blessed the Israelites and prophesied their destiny.[58]

This generous acceptance of the possibility of the salvation of non-Christians raises an important question, which brings us on to the second possible kind of non-Christian earlier noted: the person who has heard the Gospel message but has not converted. If salvation is possible outside the Church in the shape of an implicit Christianity, why is it necessary for such a person to become a Christian and Church member? De Lubac's initial response is that only those who have encountered the Church are obliged to join it, but he recognises that more needs to be said because whether a particular person encounters the Church depends on contingent circumstances. Neither can joining the Church be obligated as part of an idea of 'progress' in faith, because this wrongly supposes that faith may be measured by degree.[59]

De Lubac's response to the question is in two parts: a defence of Christian belief, and a defence of the obligation to Church membership. Unlike other religions, he contends, the Christian faith posits a purpose or *telos* to human life. Although any religious believer might gain heightened spiritual awareness or be motivated by a deep love, something is missing in the non-Christian religions. De Lubac writes: 'Outside Christianity nothing attains its end, that only end, toward which, unknowingly, all human desires, all human endeavours, are in movement: the embrace of God in Christ.'[60] This end is linked with the unity of common life, which no other religion or social movement except Christianity is able to provide.[61]

Ultimately, however, to ground a theology of mission in the welfare or salvation of non-Christians is misguided. It is presumptuous, de Lubac suggests, for Christians to suppose that the

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[58] C, pp. 188–90; Ruth, 2 Kgs 5, Num. 22–4; see also Gerald O'Collins, *Salvation for All: God's Other Peoples* (Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 25–34.

[59] C, p. 221.

[60] C, p. 224.

[61] C, p. 225.

salvation of non-Christians is secured by the activity of the institutional churches. Rather, mission is a Christian imperative because it is the nature of the Church and the message of Christ. The history of the Church is nothing other than the history of its mission in the world, and the Church remains incomplete in so far as that mission contains gaps. Catholicity imposes upon the Church a 'continual demand'[62] to bring all people to her saving redemption and to the form of Christ.

Nevertheless, even from an ecclesial perspective non-Christians should not be regarded as merely prospective Christians. Their continuing presence in the world serves to remind Christians of the millennia of preparation that were required for the gradual raising up of the social, intellectual and material life of humankind to the level at which it was ready to receive the Gospel of Christ. De Lubac writes of non-Christians that there might be 'found in their beliefs and consciences a certain groping after the truth, its painful preparation or its partial anticipation, discoveries of the natural reason and tentative solutions'.[63] Moreover, non-Christians who lived before the time of Christ are not like scaffolding, to be discarded once the building of the Christian faith has been constructed. Rather, just as the heavenly Jerusalem is built of living stones, so its scaffolding is also constructed out of living beings. Because all humans share the same eternal destiny, it cannot be the case that some exist, or have in past history existed, only to 'prepare suitable conditions for the development of others'.[64] Although non-Christians 'themselves are not in the normal way of salvation, they will be able nevertheless to obtain this salvation by virtue of those mysterious bonds which unite them to the faithful. In short, they can be saved because they are an integral part of that humanity which is to be saved.'[65] On de Lubac's view, the Church leads towards salvation even those who are not Christians, and indeed must do so in order to be true to its own calling.

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[62] C, p. 229.

[63] C, p. 232.

[64] C, pp. 232–3.

[65] C, p. 233.

Despite taking seriously the possibility that non-Christians will be saved, de Lubac also recognises the contrary theological axiom, more widely accepted in his day and originating with Cyprian of Carthage, that outside the Church there is no salvation (*extra Ecclesiam nulla salus*).[66] How may these two positions be compatible? The historic formulae that subsequently developed Cyprian's principle, de Lubac immediately adds, excepted the case of invincible ignorance among pagans of good will.[67] So even official Church teaching has been more nuanced than might be supposed. However, from at least the time of Pope Innocent III (1198–1216) the principle of *extra Ecclesiam nulla salus* has been interpreted as excluding the possibility of salvation to Christians in other Churches. According to this view, only members of the Roman Catholic Church may be saved.

Viewed positively, Cyprian's principle affirms the power of salvation rather than speculating on damnation. However, despite what de Lubac might have hoped, very many people would not view any Church as the place 'to which a soul amenable to the suggestions of grace spontaneously tends'.[68] Yet in an age where global communications make the message of many Churches, including that of the Roman Catholic Church, immediately present across the globe, it is increasingly unrealistic for theologians to posit the existence of a category of person who has had no opportunity to gain any knowledge of that message.

De Lubac concludes his discussion of mission by emphasising the strong imperative on Christians to engage in missionary work, which is the 'duty of all, normally no doubt the least

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[66] *The Letters of St. Cyprian of Carthage* 73.21.2 (trans. G.W. Clarke; 4 vols.; New York: Newman, 1984–9), vol. 4, p. 66.

[67] Ignorance was deemed 'invincible' if it could not have been avoided. For instance, a non-Christian living in a region that no missionary had ever visited could be deemed invincibly ignorant of the Christian message and Church, whereas a non-Christian who ignored the preaching of visiting missionaries could not.

[68] C, p. 236.

determined of all duties, but the strictest and the most universal'.[69] By this he means that mission is not, for example, like attending mass, which takes place at specified times according to a set format. Opportunities for mission are varied and frequently unexpected, and must therefore be seized as and when they appear. Through its long preparation, foundation and expansion the Church was intended for all, so Christians who have been brought within it have no entitlement to enjoy their situation in proud, isolated superiority.[70] On the contrary, Christians have been brought into the Church for the salvation of those outside, in order that all may enjoy their full, God-given humanity. The desire to evangelize, de Lubac insists, cannot be grounded in the supposition that those outside the Church are, or will be, rejected or cursed. Rather, the missionary endeavour entails great respect for the humanity of the person being evangelised, a humanity which they already possess.[71] As will now be seen, however, in the France of de Lubac's day such respect was not afforded to all people.

[E] The Jewish persecution

On 10 May 1940 the German army invaded France and an armistice was signed just six weeks later. This was effectively a surrender, with the country divided into an occupied northern zone, which included Paris, and a notionally sovereign southern zone, which was governed from the spa town of Vichy and commonly known as the Vichy Republic. Many Parisian intellectuals relocated to Lyons, which was within the southern zone and where de Lubac lived and worked. He concurs with the common assessment that his city became the capital of the Resistance.[72]

In this situation, de Lubac's consideration of the relation of Christianity to other religions was not restricted to abstract academic reflection. He was in demand in the city as a speaker and some of his lectures were published. Nevertheless, the secular and church media were being

[69] C, p. 241.

[70] C, p. 243.

[71] TFM, p. 2.

[72] ASC, p. 48.

manipulated in order to promote Nazi ideology, and de Lubac describes his daily increasing anguish at the degradation of consciences and his own feeling of powerlessness.[73] On 15 April 1941 he wrote to his superiors to protest against the 'anti-Christian revolution' brought about by the Nazi regime and the eight years of religious persecution already suffered in Germany.[74] Roman Catholic schools, associations, theological faculties, religious orders and media had been closed or rendered ineffectual, sterilization and medical murder had been legalized, concentration camps had been built on French soil and a culture of political authoritarianism that amounted to a neo-pagan worship of the state had become rapidly engrained in society.

Indissolubly linked with all of this was anti-Semitism. In response, de Lubac repeats Pope Pius XI's 1928 condemnation of 'hatred directed against the people who were once the chosen people of God' and insists that any contravention of the requirements of love and justice, even if not directed against the Church, is an offence to the Church.[75] He writes:

> The anti-Semitism of today was unknown to our fathers; besides its degrading effect on those who abandon themselves to it, it is anti-Christian. It is against the Bible, against the Gospel as well as the Old Testament, against the universalism of the Church, against what is called the 'Roman International'; it is against all that Pius XI, following Saint Paul, claimed as ours the day he cried out: 'Spiritually we are Semites!' It is all the more important to be on our guard, for this anti-Semitism is already gaining ground among the Catholic elite, even in our religious houses. There we have a danger that is only all too real.[76]

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[73] CRA, p. 25.

[74] TH, pp. 428–39.

[75] TH, pp. 432, 437.

[76] TH, pp. 437–8/CRA, pp. 26–7. These often repeated words of Pope Pius XI were spoken to a group of Belgian pilgrims on 6 September 1938. See also TFM, pp. 421, 437, 487.

De Lubac's letter was cordially received by his provincial and his rector. Nevertheless, it did not make much wider impact. On 3 June 1941, less than two months later, a law was passed requiring all Jews to register with the authorities. Although just one in a series of over 50 laws, decrees, orders and rulings directed at the Jews, it was rightly recognised by de Lubac and others as especially pernicious because the list produced could later be used by the occupying German forces for the purposes of internment and deportation.[77] This is exactly what occurred.

Following the passing of the registration law, de Lubac and three colleagues formed a group to produce a 'Draft of a Declaration of the Catholic Theological Faculty of Lyons'. Abbé Joseph Chaine, their convenor, occupied the Old Testament chair and was chaplain for the university parish. Louis Richard, a Sulpician, was professor of dogma and director of the university seminary. Fr Joseph Bonsirven, a Jesuit recently arrived from Belgium, was an expert in ancient Judaism. The group thus brought together Christian theologians and experts in Jewish history and scripture. The key theological statement in their draft declaration read:

> The Church cannot forget that the Israelites are the descendants of the people who were the object of the divine election of which she is the culmination, of those people from whom Christ, our Saviour, the Virgin Mary and the apostles sprang; that they have in common with us the books of the Old Testament, the inspired pages of which we read in our liturgy, the psalms from which we sing to praise God and express our hope for his Kingdom; that, according to the words of Pius XI, we, like they, are sons of Abraham, the father of believers, and that the blessing promised to his descendants is still upon them, to call them to recognize in Jesus the Christ who was promised to them.[78]

The 'Chaine Declaration' was not, however, officially published. No public media would be likely to be willing to undertake the task, and any attempt to solicit a publisher would probably have

[77] CRA, pp. 50–6.

[78] CRA, pp. 67–8.

attracted official attention and measures such as the closure of the faculty. However, Cardinal Gerlier, the Archbishop of Lyons, authorised clandestine circulation.[79]

De Lubac attributes the document's limited impact to its theological (rather than popular) tone and the absence of a developed distribution network. Nevertheless, the text is important for two reasons. First, it demonstrates how closely bound up de Lubac's theology of religion, especially concerning Judaism, was with concrete events. Second, the proposed clandestine distribution of texts would be achieved far more effectively later that year, when a complex undercover network was established to circulate the *Cahiers du Témoignage chrétien*.[80] These pamphlets pursued similar themes to the Chaine Declaration, but were aimed at a wider readership.[81] De Lubac was one of their most active writers and editors, and his work exposed him to considerable danger.

Theologically, de Lubac's determined defence of the Jewish people was founded on his conviction that, as a believer in Christ, he was a member of a Church that existed in an organic relationship with them. He presents the Old Testament as replete with images of the Church. Job in his trials is the persecuted Church. The Church is Paradise, with Christ the tree of life in its centre; she is Noah's ark, saving her people from death; she is Jerusalem, the city of David and the Temple of Solomon; she is numerous faithful women through whom God works.[82] But de Lubac does not relate the Church to Israel only by means of images. Strikingly, in a lecture delivered and published in 1941 he views the mission of the Church as the continuation of the mission of Israel. The Church has been prepared for its missionary duty by the 'prophets and by the whole history of Israel such as the Holy Books, read and commented on in its assemblies, unfolded to her'.[83] These have given her,

[79] CRA, pp. 61, 71.

[80] CRA, pp. 131–45.

[81] For more, David Grumett, *De Lubac: A Guide for the Perplexed* (London: T&T Clark, 2007), pp. 40–3.

[82] C, pp. 183–8.

[83] TH, p. 371.

even during her past infancy, an extraordinary self-understanding. The Church is the 'heir of the Chosen People and of its hopes'. She is the 'true Israel, Israel according to the spirit, because she alone, thanks to the spiritual revolution of the gospel, can bring to a conclusion the work for which Yahweh has raised up Israel'.

The missionary idea arose in Israel as a result of the prior recognition of the God of the patriarchs and of Moses as unique, exclusive and single. De Lubac attaches particular importance to the universalist strand within Israel and to those prophets who were 'proclaimers of the New Testament in the midst of the Old', citing Augustine's description of David, who spared his enemy Saul from death, as a 'man in the Old Testament but not of the Old Testament, saved by faith in the future inheritance of Christ'.[84] De Lubac finds this 'summit of prophecy' powerfully present in Deutero-Isaiah (Is. 40–55), in which the foreigners who join themselves to the Lord will be brought to his holy mountain and made joyful, with their burnt-offerings and sacrifices accepted on the altar of what has become a house of prayer for all peoples (56.6-8). A key figure in this expansion of Israelite boundaries is the mysterious suffering servant, in whom 'Jewish universalism becomes missionary'.[85] Distant coasts and peoples are to hear his voice, and Israel is to become a light to the nations, so that salvation may extend to the ends of the earth (49.1,6). Teaching will go out from this servant, his justice will be a light for the peoples, and he will deliver salvation (51.4-5). The ambiguity about the identity of the servant, who is sometimes presented as a particular man but in other places as the personification of Israel collectively, is viewed by de Lubac as profoundly significant, suggesting that the identity of the saviour is inseparable from that of his people.[86] From this missionary perspective even the Babylonian exile may be viewed as providential, as by Tobit in his call to the children of Israel to acknowledge God before the nations 'for he has scattered you

[84] TH, p. 373; see *Augustine's Commentary on Galatians* 43 (trans. Eric Plumer; Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. 204–5.

[85] TH, p. 374.

[86] TH, p. 375.

among them' (Tob. 13.3). De Lubac repeats the 'sublime' Isaianic vision of the reconciliation that this mission will ultimately achieve: the 'highway from Egypt to Assyria' along which the people of each nation will pass in order to worship together. This will also draw in Israel as a 'blessing in the midst of the earth' (Is. 19.23-5).[87] This imagery is connected with the similarly spectacular vision of Isaiah 60: the nations will walk in the light of Israel, which will receive the abundance of the sea and the wealth of nations, which will fly 'like doves to their windows'.

[F] Islamo-Christian dialogue?

Despite the inspiring visions of Isaiah, harmonious religious convergence is unlikely to occur in present, sinful earthly life. The reality is sometimes interreligious tension and conflict, usually linked with political and social change. This was true of France during the 1960s and 1970s, which saw high levels of Muslim immigration. In 1962, when the French government recognised Algerian independence, *harki* soldiers from Algeria who had been fighting with the French army were allowed to settle in France as citizens, joining many others fleeing the country in response to the instability and French withdrawal. Then in 1976 the French government passed the *regroupement familial* (family regrouping) law. This permitted the families of typically male immigrant workers to come to France, join their husbands and fathers, and gain citizenship. As a result, many children and wives of Muslim immigrants arrived in France to settle. The large majority of these were Maghrebi, including Moroccans and Tunisians as well as Algerians. The numbers were greatest in industrial areas, especially Paris, where de Lubac spent his final years following the closure of the Jesuit scholasticate in Lyons in 1974.

From a Christian perspective, the rise of Islam in France could be viewed negatively, as a consequence of the French state's secular policy of pursuing what has been, at best, a neutral approach to Christianity. However, from a broader religious perspective one can well imagine de Lubac commending the way in which second generation immigrants have spectacularly challenged

[87] TH, pp. 391–2.

the secular terms on which they have been accepted as citizens, and endorsing the resurgence of religion within an historically secular public sphere. In any case, in view of the large scale social changes that Muslim immigration around him produced it is surprising that de Lubac did not produce an essay on Islam. He did, however, offer disparate reflections in the course of writings on other topics. Because of the importance of Islam in present day France, this chapter would be incomplete without some attempt to piece together these reflections.

De Lubac recognised that, in the Gobi Desert, Islam had many centuries ago 'invaded' and 'triumphed' over all other religions, and now covered everything with its 'uniform coloring'.[88] However, in its capacity to spread by making large numbers of converts, Islam is by no means unique. When distinguishing his two types of monotheism, de Lubac places Islam in the second, which, he states, is 'charged with an explosive force'.[89] This is an accurate description of the power of Islam today. However, de Lubac goes on to insist that the power of monotheisms of this second type cannot be accounted for by demographics, migration or global economics, as if properly religious factors were mere epiphenomena of these. Referring to the migration of the Prophet Muhammad and his followers from Mecca to Medina in 622, he writes: 'The Arabs before the Hegira had hardly any unity. We have observed that the idea of God, in its highest as well as most humble appearances, breaks out of and overflows all social as well as mental frameworks.' Nevertheless, within the second, 'explosive' type of monotheism de Lubac also places Christianity, which has witnessed massive numbers of conversions globally and which indisputably remains the world's most successful missionary religion. This suggests that the mission of Islam is analogous to that of Christianity and arguably a radicalization of it.

Alongside this suggested continuity between Christianity and Islam needs to be set a more critical exposition contained within a 1965 preface to a study of mysticism by de Lubac's fellow Jesuit André Ravier. In this, de Lubac critiques the tendency to understand religion and mysticism

[88] TF, pp. 300, 305.

[89] TF, p. 329.

as if they were two separate things. Rather, he argues, the rules and practices of religion need to be accepted together with the experiential dimension of mysticism, as part of a unified way of believing. De Lubac contends that Islam does not, in practice, usually achieve this. Islam, he argues, takes seriously the root meaning of religion (*religio*, from *relegere*) as a 'feeling of obligation accompanied by fear and scruples toward the superior powers',[90] with the Koran functioning as an exterior and ritualistic code. Drawing on the relatively irenic work of the Roman Catholic priest Louis Massignon, de Lubac correctly recognises that the Koran leaves some openings for spiritual experience. However, he contends that its interpretive community typically closes these off, and 'condemns as a sacrilege the temerity of anyone who aspires to divine union or believes himself called to it'.[91] Islam does, of course, have mystical traditions, notably Sufism, but de Lubac avers that even these accept a retreat from mysticism in its fullest sense by failing to contest the incommunicability of the divine message that mainstream Islam supposes. Even the Prophet Muhammad, at his nocturnal ascension, journeyed only as far as the gate of the heavenly city and, unlike Christ, not into the love of God himself. De Lubac writes: 'For the Muslim, the Christian belief in the divine Incarnation and the new order of relations that it established between man and God can only be a blasphemy.' For Muslims, he continues, the 'only possible relationship with God is expressed in the word Islam, which means "submission"'.[92]

On the basis of this exposition it should not be assumed that de Lubac is aggressively hostile to Islam. Rather, he is at pains to comprehend its differences with Christianity, especially its conception of the supernatural as relatively inaccessible. His final attitude is illumined by one of his last written pieces: a 1988 preface to Charles Molette's biography of the Muslim convert Monsignor Paul Mulla-Zadé. De Lubac presents the study as suggestive for what he terms an 'Islamo-Christian dialogue' on the grounds that it examines the 'unfolding of a long drama' in which this dialogue is

[90] TF, p. 41.

[91] TF, p. 41.

[92] TF, p. 41.

pursued within a single conscience.[93] Indeed, he here describes Islam and the Christian faith as 'the' two monotheisms. Might they thereby be viewed as providing alternative paths to a truth that exceeds both? Intriguingly, Molette recounts how Mulla's conversion—along with that of another scholar, the Franciscan Jean Mohammed Abdel-Jalil—received impetus from correspondence with Maurice Blondel. This Roman Catholic lay philosopher, who exerted tremendous influence on de Lubac and the whole generation of French Jesuits of which he was part, had laid the philosophical foundations for what would become the latter's doctrine of the supernatural: that is, that all aspects of spiritual and natural life are dependent upon divine grace, and that all are incomplete until they attain in truth the object of the divine union that is present within them by implication. The consequences of this doctrine for an understanding of Islam are ambivalent. Although it suggests that all religious manifestations contain an element of divine truth, its dynamic of ascent and union imply that the Islamic religion is nevertheless exceeded by the Christian fusion of religion with mysticism. De Lubac warms to Mulla-Zadé and Abdel-Jalil because they were converts, while nevertheless praising their 'ever-proclaimed fidelity to the best of what they owed to Islam'.[94]

[G] Conclusion

De Lubac's studies and reflections on religion span his professional academic life of more than fifty years: time teaching in Lyons, spiritual resistance to anti-Semitism, the postwar build-up to the Second Vatican Council, and later writings. Strikingly, most were produced significantly before the Council, which endorsed a somewhat more open treatment of the non-Christian religions than that which had preceded it. Some of the studies, including those from his early years, were ground-breaking. His research into Christianity in central Asia anticipates the greatly increased current interest in world Christianity and the slowly growing recognition that Christianity did not originate in Europe. Moreover, his study of religion incorporates the kind of interdisciplinary

[93] TH, p. 575.

[94] TH, p. 576.

perspectives that are being promoted in many universities today.[95] His broad acceptance of the concept of 'primitive monotheism' might appear more contentious, in view of many of the critiques of the hypothesis launched from within the Vienna School. Nonetheless, on a careful reading de Lubac did not posit a common primeval revelation underlying different religions, which was the principal and justifiable target of those critiques.[96] Indeed, he later contended that the idea of God confounds the 'laborious syntheses of ethnologists and historians', stating: 'All attempts to find a "genesis" for the idea of God—like the attempts to "reduce" it to something else by explaining its genesis—err in some respect or other. The idea of God is a unique idea, distinct from all others, and it cannot be fitted into any system.'[97]

Living in a constitutionally secular French state and in a Europe that had been ravaged by the anti-Christian politics of both Nazism and Communism, de Lubac focused, in so much of his oeuvre, on apologetics and Christian mission. It is perhaps in relation to these, rather than against abstract theological categories, that his writings on religion should be assessed. In 1980 de Lubac recognised that, in modern society, the rejection of religion as a legitimate category of discourse is often grounded in a similar misunderstanding to that which motivated the rejection of the idea of Christian culture: that to acknowledge the transcendent is to accept an alien and restrictive intrusion into ordinarily natural life.[98] However, he also maintained that religion is an analogous concept, which being such does not refer to structurally identical belief configurations in different contexts.[99] Attacking syncretistic understandings of religion, he protests: 'With no regard to genuine Christianity, today every species of the "sacred" or even every tawdry imitation thereof, every

[95] For instance, on Mousterian religious belief, Graham Ward, *Unbelievable: Why We Believe and Why We Don't* (London: Tauris, 2014), pp. 29–60.

[96] For which, Zimoń, 'Wilhelm Schmidt's Theory', pp. 252–5.

[97] DG, p. 20.

[98] BC, pp. 95–6.

[99] BC, pp. 96–8.

religion, every spirituality, every culture is being exalted, amid total confusion and with no effort at discrimination.'[100] This uncompromising critique provides a suitable note of warning on which to end. De Lubac does not view other religions as equivalent to Christianity, but he does regard them as linked with Christianity as a result of past interactions and contingent structural affinities. Because historical and theoretical dimensions are intrinsic to belief in any form, Christianity cannot be understood or lived out in separation from them or from the connections with non-Christian religions that they bring.

[H] Recommended Reading

Henri de Lubac, *Catholicism: Christ and the Common Destiny of Man* (trans. Lancelot C. Sheppard and Elizabeth Englund; San Francisco: Ignatius, 1988 [1947]), pp. 156–64, 217–45.

———, *Christian Resistance to Anti-Semitism: Memories from 1940–44* (trans. Elizabeth Englund; San Francisco: Ignatius, 1990).

———. 'Msgr. Paul Mulla-Zadé' [1988], in *Theology in History* (trans. Anne Englund Nash; San Francisco: Ignatius, 1996), pp. 575–7.

———, *The Discovery of God* (trans. Alexander Dru with Marc Sebanc and Cassian Fulsom Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996 [1956]), pp. 21–33.

———, 'The origin of religion' [1935], in *Theological Fragments* (trans. Rebecca Howell Balinski; San Francisco: Ignatius, 1989), pp. 309–332.

[100] BC, p. 99.

———, ‘Secrets from the sands of the Gobi Desert’ [1933], in *Theological Fragments*, pp. 289–307.

———, ‘The theological foundation of the missions’ [1941], in *Theology in History*, pp. 367–94.

David Grumett and Thomas Plant, ‘De Lubac, Pure Land Buddhism, and Roman Catholicism’, *The Journal of Religion* 92 (2012), pp. 58–83.